

DEAR DIARY

By

MINAHAL SITTAR

We often get caught up in chasing an idealized ever after overlooking the beauty of present moments.

Overthinking can distort our perceptions, causing us to misjudge others and miss out on genuine connections. By being mindful and letting go excessive negative analysis, we can appreciate the joy in everyday and see people for who they truly are.

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As she closed her laptop, the soft click echoed through the quiet room, punctuating the culmination of months of tireless effort. Emily let out a deep breath, feeling a mix of relief, exhaustion, and a hint of sadness. Her book titled "*Happily Ever After*," was finally complete, and she had just sent the final draft to her editor.

She took a sip of her black coffee, savoring the bitter taste as her mind wandered back to the journey that had brought her to this moment.

As she gazed out the window, Emily's thoughts drifted to the person who had inspired her story.

As Emily's eyes began to well up, she smiled, feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment. The book was more than just a story; it was a tribute to the woman who lost her everything in search of "*Happily Ever After*".

One Year Ago

The car tires crunched over the gravel as the sun dipped low, casting golden hues over the countryside.

Emily a single woman in her mid-twenties, drove with a soft smile playing on her lips. Her phone was wedged between her shoulder and ear as she chatted with her best friend, Roma

"I still can't believe you actually did it," Roma said, laughter in her voice. "You left Home!"

"I know!" Emily grinned, her eyes shining with excitement. "No noisier uncles, screaming cousins, or surprise guests every Sunday. I finally have my own space. And wait till you see this place, it's straight out of a novel. Trees, flowers, silence... it's perfect."

She turned onto a narrow lane lined with tall trees and saw the house appear ahead—quaint, with moss-covered stone steps, a small garden with overgrown lavender, and aged wooden windows that seemed to hold stories of their own. It was a dream. Her dream.

"I love it already," she whispered into the phone before saying her goodbyes. "Time to unpack. Talk later?"

Roma laughed. "Don't get haunted. Bye, writer girl."

With a chuckle, Emily ended the call and stretched, breathing in the stillness. She walked around slowly, brushing her fingers against the furniture left behind by the previous tenant. The place had character aged but warm.

As she rounded the corner to what she decided would be her writing nook, something caught her eye. In the far corner of the bookshelf, partially buried under a stack of old newspapers, was a diary. The cover was leather, cracked with age, and a delicate ribbon dangled from its spine.

"Hmm," she murmured, picking it up. "Must've belonged to the last tenant."

She almost placed it aside but hesitated. Curiosity tugged at her, but she shoved the diary into a drawer.

Later that evening, after lighting a few candles, brewing herself a cup of tea, and curling into the window seat with a view of the twilight sky, she spotted the diary again—its ribbon sticking out from the drawer like a teasing grin.

She bit her lip, sipped her tea, and stared at it.

"I shouldn't..."

But the silence around her was heavy now, as if urging her to take a peek.

Finally, with a sigh of surrender, she pulled it out and opened the front cover.

The first page was filled with doodles—elegant swirls, a few stars, crescent moons, and what looked like strange symbols. At the center, in bold capital letters, one word was highlighted over and over in gold ink: TARA.

"Tara," she whispered aloud. "Must be the name of the owner... or someone important."

Randomly, she opened to a page somewhere near the middle.

September 1/1995

Dear Tara,

Happy birthday.

I turned 18 today. My birthday as always boring. There were no streamers, no music, no messages from friends lighting up your phone. No one asked what you wanted to do today. No candles to blow just a simple homemade cake and my parents. Just... another day, another set of expectations to meet. But today matters, even if no one else thinks it does—because today I turn eighteen.

I've spent eighteen years being told who to be. Eighteen years balancing between two lives i never chose. At home, expected to be the obedient daughter of two people who left their homeland but brought every piece of it with them. Even the weight. Especially the weight.

In the world outside your front door, you were just another American girl. But inside these four walls? You were a project—a reflection of your parents' hopes, fears, honor, and pride.

My parents love me. I know that. But their love has always come with walls. Quiet, cold walls made of rules and shame and invisible checklists. Every time i tried to push against them, they tightened their grip. It wasn't enough to behave you had to be "modest." It wasn't enough to be smart you had to be wise, silent, and unseen. You were told not to speak loudly. Not to laugh too freely. Not to ask too many questions. My childhood was a list of don'ts.

Don't wear that.

Don't go there.

Don't talk to boys.

Don't ask why.

And when you did ask why when the pressure started making cracks in your skin the answer was always the same:

"Because that's not how we do things."

"We're not like them."

"You're a girl. You have to be careful."

"You don't understand now, but you will someday."

But what if i never do understand?

What if "someday" never comes?

What if i don't want to be protected anymore, if protection means being caged?

Because that's what it's felt like. A pretty, polished cage with "family honor" carved into the bars.

I'm not a bad daughter just tired....

Tired of being shaped like clay to fit into someone else's mold. Tired of being asked to shrink yourself in the name of tradition. Tired of carrying guilt for wanting more.

And i do want more.

I want to travel the world and walk down a street at night without fear. I want to cry loudly and laugh even louder. I want to write stories that make people feel seen. I want to scream truth into the sky and not apologize for the echo.

I want love that breathes.

That listens.

That lets you grow.

On this 18th birthday I just want to break those shackles....

I will not be the shadow of someone else's dream.

I will not live half a life to make others comfortable.

I will not bury my voice to avoid shaking the ground.

I will break rules if those rules break me.

I've lived half my life in silence. But the other half? The other half is going to roar.

TARA.

Emily closed the notebook, took a deep breath "Why am I seeing myself in her?" she asked herself.

I guess everyone thinks alike at a certain age..... She sighed and opened the notebook again.

September 18 / 1996

Dear Diary,

I'm 19 today.

No cake. No party. Just a quiet dinner with my parents, who were glowing with pride. They didn't say "happy birthday" in the way some parents do—with balloons or singing. But I saw it in their eyes when they brought out my favorite dish and said, "For our future doctor." That was their way of celebrating me. Their way of saying, we love you because you are everything we wanted you to be.

Only I'm not.

Not even close.

I'm not in med school.

I never was.

I applied to the Fine Arts program with trembling hands and a racing heart, fully prepared to be rejected not just by the university, but by the universe. I still remember the day the acceptance letter came. I didn't scream. I didn't cry. I just sat on the floor and whispered, "It's real. I'm real."

But when the fantasy ended and reality returned—when I looked into my mother's eyes and saw all her dreams hanging there like chandeliers made of glass—I couldn't tell her. I couldn't break it. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

So I lied.

I told them I got into the medical program, just like they wanted. I forged a future they could believe in while quietly building one I could live in. I forged documents. I created schedules. I memorized fake professor names. I even made fake group chats with other "medical students" in case they ever checked my phone.

God. I feel crazy writing this down.

But I also feel free.

Because during the day, I sit in a studio with paint-streaked jeans, my fingers stained with charcoal and acrylics, listening to music that speaks to my soul. I sketch strangers and make up stories about them. I spend hours trying to capture the way light hits a window or how sadness settles into someone's shoulders.

I feel like I'm breathing for the first time.

And every evening, I come home and pretend to be someone I'm not. I tell them about imaginary labs, pretend I'm exhausted from studying biology, when in reality, I've spent the whole day drawing hands. Real ones. Delicate, trembling, powerful hands. The kind that create—not just heal.

I'm living a double life.

One of silence. One of color.

And I'm scared, Diary. So scared. Every day, I worry they'll find out. That I'll slip up. That someone will call our house or they'll run into a distant cousin whose child actually is in med school and the whole tower will fall apart.

But I'm more scared of the alternative: of waking up one day and realizing I lived my whole life as a lie that they authored.

So happy birthday, Tara

You started your quiet rebellion.

Now don't stop.

September 18th/1997

Dear Diary,

I'm 20 today.

No candles. No warm dinner. No soft, secret smile from Mama. No teasing question from Baba about when I'm finally going to grow up.

Just silence.

Because now they know.

They know I lied.

They know I never set foot in a medical lecture hall, never opened a biology textbook, never touched a stethoscope. They know I've spent the last two years with charcoal under my nails and paint on my shoes. They know I've been pouring my soul into canvases, not cadavers.

And worst of all... they know that I'm not sorry.

It happened three weeks ago. A call from the university. Something about a transcript confirmation Baba needed for a family friend's son. I wasn't home. I didn't know.

By the time I got back, everything was on the table—my real enrollment papers, my student ID, even the gallery invite I'd stupidly left in my sketchbook.

Mama was crying.

Baba... Baba was quiet at first. He just stared at me with this look I can't erase from my memory. Not anger. Not even betrayal. Just this deep, wounded disbelief. Like he didn't recognize me.

"Do you understand what you've done?"

"You lied to us for two years!"

"Art is not a future, Tara—it's a hobby!"

"You want to throw your life away for this nonsense?"

Mama begged me to switch back. She said I could still fix it, that it wasn't too late. That if I just transferred, all of this could be forgotten.

But I can't forget. And I won't switch.

I tried to explain.

I told them art is not nonsense to me. That I don't want to be someone else's definition of successful. That I feel whole when I'm creating—that it's not about fame or fortune, it's about belonging to myself.

I told them I was finally happy. That even if I struggle, I'll be myself in the struggle.

I just hate that my dreams had to suffocate under theirs.

Since then, Baba hasn't said more than a few words to me. He walks past me like I'm furniture. Or a stranger. I say "Good morning," and he doesn't respond. I walk into a room and he walks out.

Mama tries to soften things. She brings me tea. She asks if I'm eating. But her eyes are always full of questions she's afraid to ask again.

But even now, with my chest feeling cracked open, I don't regret it.

How can I, when I wake up every morning excited to draw, to sketch, to tell stories through color and light and silence?

How can I, when my professors say my work has soul?

How can I, when I finally feel alive?

So tonight, on my 20th birthday, I sit in this strange silence—not as a child begging for approval, but as a woman choosing her truth.

I don't know what comes next.

But no matter what happens...

I won't put down the brush.

Not for anyone.

Tara

September 18th / 1998

Dear Diary,

I'm 21 today.

And for the first time in what feels like forever... I'm writing with light in my chest.

It's strange. Last year, I wrote in silence, with tear-stained hands and a heavy heart—unsure if my parents would ever look at me the same way again. Two years ago, I was still living a lie.

But today... I painted all morning, had coffee with classmates who have become family, and came home to Mama's quiet knock on my door. She didn't say "Happy birthday" in the way I always wished for when I was little. But she brought in a plate of sweets, kissed my forehead, and said, "You're growing up,"

And Dad?

He didn't say anything, of course. But during dinner, he asked how my art exhibit prep is going. His voice was neutral, but that's something. He didn't roll his eyes. He didn't scoff. He just... listened. That's the most peace we've had in years.

I think I'm finally allowed to be me in this house—even if it's still a quiet permission.

But that's not why I'm writing tonight, Diary.

No.

I'm writing because... I met someone.

And he makes me feel like the version of myself I thought I had to bury to survive.

His name is Joseph

He's not just someone I like. He's someone who sees me. Not as a rebellious daughter or the black sheep or the girl who ruined her parents' dreams. He sees me as Tara, the artist. The girl with dreams bigger than rules.

And when I'm with him, the world softens.

But.

Of course, there's always a "but," isn't there?

He's not of same religion as me.....

Not from "our world."

And that terrifies me.

Because my parents barely accepted the artist in me. How will they ever accept someone outside the circle of faith and culture they guard so tightly?

They'd never approve. Not now. Maybe not ever.

And that thought... it hurts. Deeply. Because I love my parents. Even when they broke my heart, I still loved them. And now that we've stitched some things back together, I can't bear the thought of tearing it all apart again.

But I don't want to think about that tonight.

Tonight, I just want to remember his laugh echoing in the museum hall. I want to remember the way he looked at me when I showed him my favorite piece. Like I was the artist and the artwork at the same time.

Because for the first time in a long time, I feel like my story might finally include love.

Real love.

And if there's anything I've learned since I turned 18... it's that I deserve to be the author of my own story.

So tonight, I'm just Tara

TARA, the daughter trying to heal old wounds.

TARA, , the girl with paint on her hands and a soft, steady heart full of wild, growing love.

Happy birthday, Tara

Don't be afraid just yet.

Just feel.

With hope and hesitation,

Tara

September 18th /1999

Dear Diary,

I'm 22 today.

Twenty-two. It feels... full. Not in a loud, fireworks kind of way—but like the feeling you get at the end of a long walk uphill when you finally sit down and see how far you've come.

Because I did it.

I graduated.

Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Not medicine. Not law.

Art.

But then one morning, Baba passed by the kitchen and asked without looking at me,

“So, what's next? You're not going to just paint in your room forever, are you?”

And I swear—I could've cried.

It wasn't an apology. It wasn't permission.

But it was acknowledgment.

He was talking about my future. On my terms.

And I knew in that moment—I'd won. Not against him. But for myself.

I've started applying for residencies. I've been selling pieces online. A small art magazine even asked to feature my work next month.

And I'm still with him.

Joseph

One whole year. And somehow, they still don't know.

Sometimes I feel guilty. Like I'm living a hundred lives in secret.

But other times... it feels like the only way I can survive.

He's been my safe place through it all. He came to my graduation—stood in the back, wearing a suit that didn't quite fit and eyes that never left me.

I wanted to run to him after the ceremony.

But instead, I took photos with classmates while he waited across the street.

God, how I love him.

I don't know what the future holds. I don't know how long I can keep hiding. I don't know what will happen when the truth about him finally collides with the fragile peace I've rebuilt at home.

But tonight, I don't want to worry.

Tonight, I'm 22.

A graduate.

An artist.

A daughter still navigating love and landmines.

A girl in love with someone she can't yet bring home—but who holds her like home every time they're together.

Happy birthday,

Tara

September 18th / 2000

Dear Diary,

I'm 23 today.

But I don't feel celebrated. I feel like a crime scene.

Everything's shattered—quietly, messily. Like glass underfoot in the dark.

They found out about Joseph

No more secrets. No quieter meetups, no more whispered phone calls in the laundry room or deleting photos before I walk through the front door.

It's all out now.

And it exploded.

Mama cried so much she could barely speak. She said she'd rather see me dead than married outside our faith. Baba... Baba didn't yell this time. He just stared at me for what felt like hours, and then collapsed to the floor in the hallway.

It wasn't dramatic—it was terrifying.

They said it was a mild heart attack. Stress-induced. He's recovering now, silent as stone, but the weight of that moment is crushing me.

And everyone—everyone—is blaming me.

Me.

For loving someone.

I choose me.

Enough.

Enough guilt. Enough shame. Enough walking on eggshells to protect their honor while they trample mine.

So what if they gave birth to me?

Am I supposed to live like a ghost in their house as repayment?

Am I supposed to hand over my whole life—my love, my future—because they raised me to be obedient rather than happy?

Because that's what it feels like. Like they fed me, clothed me, sheltered me—but only under the condition that I stay their puppet.

They say I betrayed them. But the truth is—they never trusted me. Not really. They loved their version of me. The girl who colored inside their lines.

And when I dared to draw my own shape?

They called it war.

I just wanted to paint in peace.

I wanted a quiet life full of color and love.

But this house has become a battlefield of whispers and slammed doors. I can't breathe here.

I see my art supplies and feel numb. I haven't painted in weeks.

Joseph has offered to help me move out. He told me he'll wait as long as I need—but that I don't have to stay here, chained to this pain.

And he's right.

I don't know what's coming. I don't know where I'll live or how I'll pay rent or whether I'll wake up crying tomorrow.

But I do know this:

I will not give up my life to keep someone else's illusion intact.

I will not give up love just to avoid more guilt.

I will not stay quiet while my spirit suffocates.

Pack your bags, girl.

It's time to go.

Tara

September 18th / 2001

Dear Diary,

I'm 24 today.

And I'm finally living the life I used to only imagine in stolen moments of silence.

The kind of life that once felt so far away, like a dream someone else might live—but never me.

But now I wake up every morning and see it with my own eyes.

The mountains in the distance, painted in soft blues.

The wildflowers that scatter across the little path behind our house.

The way the wind moves through the trees like it's humming its own lullaby.

And Joseph, making tea in the kitchen, sunlight on his shoulders.

This—this—is my happily ever after.

It's been two months since I packed my bags and closed the door on the house that raised me but never held me. I left behind the bitter stares, the hollow guilt, the way my father's silence used to echo louder than his words.

He said, "Don't come back. Don't call. You're no longer our daughter."

And you know what? I didn't cry.

Not even a little.

There was no heartbreak. No ache.

Just... silence.

Clean and final, like turning the last page of a book I never enjoyed.

Because the truth is—there was never emotional attachment, not the kind that nourishes or nurtures. Just duty. Control. Quiet resentment that grew and grew until it became unbearable.

But I'm free now.

I live in a house filled with color—not rules.

My canvases are scattered across the floor, some still wet with paint, others already framed for the next exhibition. I've sold four pieces this month. A gallery downtown wants to showcase my forest collection. I've started painting dreams again—not just memories. I even woke up from a nap the other day with an entire concept for a mural in my head.

My mind is overflowing with ideas. My hands are never still. My soul... is alive.

And Joseph —he’s everything I ever needed and never dared to believe I could have. We’re not perfect. We have messy days and burnt dinners and disagreements about silly things. But he holds my hand like it’s made of gold. He asks about my dreams like they matter. He looks at me like I’m not a burden—but a blessing.

I don’t miss my old life.

Not for a second.

That chapter is closed. Sealed. Forgotten.

This is my beginning.

A cottage in the hills.

A heart full of love.

A canvas that keeps begging for new stories.

And me, finally unafraid of who I’ve become.

Happy birthday, Tara

You didn’t just survive.

You created beauty from the ashes.

With love, peace, and paint-stained fingers,

Tara

September 18th / 2002

Dear Diary,

Today I turned 25.

A quarter of a century.

Somehow it feels both big and small at the same time. Like I should be standing at the top of a mountain with a crown on my head—or just curled up with a blanket and a slice of cake.

I did the latter.

Alone.

Well, not entirely. Joseph called, of course.

He's away on a business trip—last-minute meetings, some international project he's been chasing for months. He tried so hard to make it back. I could see it in his tired smile over the video call.

He even made me light the candle and blow it out while he watched.

Sang “Happy Birthday” slightly off-key, with that silly grin of his that always makes me laugh.

I cut the cake by myself, and we talked until his Wi-Fi crackled and the call dropped.

And then the silence came.

Not just the quiet kind you hear in the room—but the one that presses on your chest a little. That reminds you you're alone in the room where there should've been more voices, more laughter, maybe music.

I didn't expect it, but after the call ended...

Mom and Dad came into my mind.

For the first time in a long, long while.

It's strange.

From the day I left that house, I told myself I was done. I never called. Not for any occasion . Not on their birthdays. And they never reached out on mine either. It was a clean break—silent, sharp, complete.

But tonight... it wasn't so clean.

I remembered how my past birthdays used to be.

How Mama would cook her oily, over-spiced dishes with that overly excited look on her face. I hated most of them, tolerated some—but I never told her that. Just smiled and ate.

And Baba, always giving me gifts that made no sense. I think most of those gifts ended up in the back of my closet, untouched, buried under books and resentment.

I wonder... do they still keep my room the way it was? Or did they finally strip it down and turn it into a storeroom? Is the purple curtain still there? The one I chose at 15 when I wanted to feel like I had some say over my space?

It's odd how thoughts can just drift in like that—like uninvited guests.

I'm not crying.

I don't miss them—not in the way a daughter is supposed to.

But something inside me feels... tender.

Not regret.

Not longing.

Just a quiet ache for the girl I used to be in that house—the one who sat through birthdays biting her tongue, the one who counted down the days to freedom.

I am free now.

I'm in love, I'm working on my third gallery series, I have peace and quiet and space to breathe.

But tonight reminded me that healing doesn't always mean forgetting.

Sometimes the old wounds just hum quietly in the background, reminding you they existed—even if they no longer hurt.

Tara

September 18th / 2003

Dear Diary,

Today I turned 26.

And I spent it alone.

Not entirely alone—there were messages, a few voice notes from friends, and one single text that simply read:

“Happy Birthday.”

From him.

No call. No flowers. No surprise.

Just a text.

And it stung more than I thought it would.

Last month, I stood under bright lights at the opening night of my first solo exhibition. A dream carved out of years of defiance, tears, and brushstrokes.

People smiled.

People clapped.

People felt my art.

And he—my love—stood beside me, proud and glowing, hand on the small of my back,
whispering, “You did it, Tara”

It was one of the happiest nights of my life.

I even sent an invitation to them—my parents.

I didn’t expect anything, but... I hoped.

Hope is such a quiet traitor.

They didn’t come. Not even a reply.

And still, after all this time, a part of me searched the crowd—just in case.

I don’t know why.

Maybe because somewhere deep down, I’ve never stopped wanting them to see me—really
see me. Not as a disobedient daughter, but as a woman who survived and thrived.

But they didn’t come.

And maybe they never will.

And maybe I’m starting to understand... that they weren’t cruel.

They were just chained.

Tied to their beliefs, their fears, their need to control what they didn't understand.

Maybe I'll write them one day.

Or maybe I won't.

Some stories don't get closure, they just grow quieter over time.

But today, despite the silence... I'm not broken.

Because—I have a secret.

I'm pregnant.

A tiny life, blooming inside me like spring in a quiet forest.

I found out two weeks ago.

I haven't told him yet.

I keep replaying how I'll say it, how his eyes might widen, how he might laugh, or cry, or go speechless.

Will he hold my face and call me his miracle?

Or will he freeze in fear?

I don't know.

But right now, this moment... is mine.

I celebrated my birthday tonight with a single slice of cake and both hands resting on my stomach.

A new life is beginning inside me.

And suddenly, I'm not alone.

Not really.

Tara

September 18th / 2004

Dear Diary,

I turned 27 today.

Another candle, another quiet room.

Just a quiet breath and a few tears that surprised even me.

I still remember the way his eyes lit up when I told him he was going to be a father.

He had this half-laugh, half-cry expression on his face. Held me so tightly, like I was a miracle.

That night, we talked about names. He kissed me said, "Forever, Tara. I'll love you forever."

But life... is not always a fairytale.

A few months later, everything changed in seconds.

The rain. The sharp curve. The sound of metal twisting.

My car flipped twice. I remember screaming, then silence.

I lost the baby.

I remember staring at the hospital ceiling, numb. I couldn't feel anything—not even the pain in my body, or the glass that had sliced across my cheek, leaving scars.

All I felt was the emptiness where hope used to be.

They said I was lucky to survive.

But a part of me didn't feel lucky at all.

He was there for me, held my hand, whispered promises into the dark.

He told me I was still beautiful. That scars don't matter.

That he loved me.

He said that. He said that.

And I believed him.

He couldn't be here today.

I keep telling myself he's just busy. That he didn't forget. That I'll see his name flash across the screen any minute now.

He loves me.

I'm sure he does.

...Right?

But the silence tonight... it hurts more than I expected.

And in that silence, they came to mind.

My parents.

After all this time, I find myself circling back to them.

I used to think they were my cage. That every rule, every “no,” every expectation was a chain.

But maybe...

Maybe they were just scared.

Maybe “don’t stay out late” meant please stay safe.

Maybe “don’t wear that” meant we’re afraid the world will hurt you.

When Dad said he dreamed of me becoming a doctor, I only saw his disappointment.

But now I see something else.

A man who gave up his own dream because life was cruel to him, and in his flawed, desperate way, just wanted me to reach somewhere he couldn’t.

I never really tried to understand them.

I was too busy fighting.

Too busy painting them as villains to realize they were just... imperfect parents, trying to love the only way they knew.

My overthinking turned them into enemies.

But maybe they were never trying to imprison me—maybe they were just trying to protect me in the only language they knew. And maybe I was too young, too angry, too stubborn to translate it.

I miss them.

I miss home.

I think... I'll go see them.

Not to apologize. Not to explain.

Just to see them.

Because no matter how far we run, no matter how much we build...

The ones who gave us our first breath are never fully erased from the story.

And something in me tells me—they miss me too.

Tara

September 18th / 2005

Dear Diary,

I turned 28 today.

And I finally understand something I spent years trying to fight against:

Life is not a fairytale.

There's nothing exist as "Happily Ever After"

There are no perfect endings. No dramatic music playing in the background when things go wrong.

Just silence.

And sometimes, a breaking heart.

Last year, I waited for his message.

A simple "Happy Birthday."

What came was:

"I'm sorry."

That was the last time I ever heard from him.

No explanation.

No goodbye.

Just a few typed words that shattered two years of promises.

I still tell myself he loved me.

That maybe something went wrong inside him he didn't know how to fix.

That maybe he got scared.

That maybe he thought leaving was better than hurting me more.

But I was already hurting.

I loved him with everything I had. I still do, in a way.

And the silence he left behind... is louder than anything he ever said.

I cry sometimes. Still.

Less than before. But I do.

And when I paint... it shows.

People say my work feels different now. That the colors are dull, the eyes in my portraits look hollow. That my brush has forgotten how to feel.

Maybe they're right.

But I still paint.

Not for them.

Not for galleries.

Just... for me.

Even if I don't know what to paint anymore.

Even if the canvas stares back at me, blank and cold.

Even if my hands tremble when I hold the brush.

I'll keep painting.

Because if I stop, I'll disappear completely.

Still...

Something inside me shifted today.

Maybe it's the loneliness. Maybe it's the years I lost chasing something that wasn't real.

Or maybe it's just time.

But I think—I'm finally ready to go back.

To them.

To Mom and Dad.

I want to tell them... everything.

How much I missed them.

How much I misunderstood.

How much I regret not coming sooner.

I used to think they didn't love me the way I needed.

But now I wonder if I ever truly gave them the chance to.

I left thinking I was chasing freedom.

Now I know... freedom means nothing if you're completely alone in it.

I want to sit at our old table again.

I want to hear Mama's voice, even if it's scolding.

I want to see if Dad still keeps my room the same or if he turned it into a quiet storage for broken memories.

I want to be their daughter again.

Not the perfect daughter. Not the obedient one.

Just... Tara.

And I hope, with everything in me, that when I knock on their door...

They'll open it.

With tired hope and trembling heart,

Tara

September 18th / 2006

Dear Diary,

I turned 29 today.

There was no celebration. No candles. No cake.

Just silence. A kind that hums in my bones and doesn't leave.

Mom and Dad are gone.

I went back to the house.

The one I ran from.

The one I once called a cage.

But when I opened that old wooden door, it felt more like a grave.

Everything was still.

Frozen.

Dusty, yet untouched.

And my room...

It was the same.

The books.

The pillow I once threw during an argument.

The faint perfume of home clinging to the curtains like it didn't know time had passed.

They didn't change anything.

They waited.

They waited for me.

And I...

I waited too long.

The neighbors said there was a gas leak.

That maybe Mom forgot to turn off the stove.

She had started showing signs of dementia.

Wandering. Forgetting.

And I wasn't there.

I missed it all.

I missed the final chapters of their lives because I was too stubborn, too hurt, too sure I was the one who needed space.

I thought they were wrong.

But maybe we were just all... lost in different ways.

I can't stop trembling.

Every time I pick up a paintbrush, my fingers shake like they remember.

Remember everything I didn't say.

I wanted to tell them I loved them.

That I always did, even when I didn't understand them.

Even when I accused them in my head of not loving me right.

I wanted to tell them I know now... they were trying.

With the tools they had, with the scars they carried from their own childhoods, their own country, their own pain.

I wanted to apologize for thinking I was the only one hurting.

For thinking leaving would free me.

It didn't.

It only created silence where conversations should have been.

I had so much to say.

So many words buried beneath my pride.

But they're gone.

And I'm left here.

With a broken voice, a broken brush, and a heart full of "I should have."

I miss them.

More than I know how to say.

And I don't know how to move forward.

Not yet.

But maybe someday...

Maybe someday, I'll find the courage to paint again.

Maybe I'll paint them.

Not as I saw them back then.

But as I see them now.

With gentler eyes.

With forgiveness in every stroke.

But tonight...

Tonight I write, because I can't speak. Because the ache is too big for my voice.

But maybe not too big for this page.

Tara

September 18th / 2007

Dear Diary,

I turned 30 today.

It's a strange number. It's supposed to mean something.

A new chapter, a fresh start, some grand idea of maturity or peace.

But all I feel is empty.

Not even sad. Not angry. Not hopeful.

Just... blank.

The kind of blank that stretches on like a white wall with no window, no door, no way out.

I haven't spoken out loud in days.

I realized that this morning.

I walked around the house just to hear my own footsteps.

But they don't answer back.

Who do I talk to now?

Mom and Dad are gone.

He's gone.

Even my art has left me.

Some days ago, my neighbor—kind, concerned, nosey in that harmless old-lady way—told me I should go see a psychiatrist.

She said she's worried.

That I'm showing signs of depression.

That the quietness in my house is too loud.

I laughed. I actually laughed.

Not because it was funny, but because I didn't know how else to respond.

She thinks I'm going crazy.

But I'm not.

I'm not.

I mean—

Nobody dies of quietness, right?

Nobody dies of being bored or alone, right?

People have lived in cabins in the woods with nothing but birds and trees for company and they didn't go mad.

I'm fine.

I'm just...

I'm just a little tired.

Of silence.

Of memories.

Of birthdays that feel like anniversaries of all the things I've lost.

But it's okay.

I'm okay.

I'm perfectly alright.

I don't know anymore.

Maybe I should talk to someone.

Maybe I just need to hear someone say my name.

Maybe I just want to know I still exist outside these four walls.

But today, all I did was write to you.

Because you're all I have left who listens.

Even if you're only a page.

Tara

September 18th / 2008

“In chasing forever, I lost today.”

Dear Diary,

Today I turned 31.

Another year. Another birthday.

Still breathing. Still alone.

I lit a candle on a slice of bread today — the closest thing I had to cake.

There was no singing. No laughter. No voices.

Just me... and the echo of memories I can't touch anymore.

I thought turning thirty would be the milestone.

But thirty-one?

It's something different.

It's not a celebration — it's a realization.

In finding my 'Happily Ever After,'

I lost all the happy moments that could have led me there.

I spent so long chasing the perfect future...

A peaceful life away from rules,

A love story that felt like art,

A career painted in light and freedom.

But in chasing the horizon, I never looked down at the wildflowers beneath my feet.

I remember Mom humming in the kitchen while burning the rice — again.

Dad walking in with ridiculous socks he claimed were “on sale” but probably weren’t.

I remember rainy afternoons painting by the window while he read quietly behind me.

I never thought those were the moments.

I thought they were fillers — waiting time.

But they were the story.

They were the gold tucked in between pages I tore too fast.

My overthinking killed me slowly.

Not in a dramatic, stormy way.

But in a quiet erosion —

A voice that always asked:

“Is this enough? What if there’s better? What if they don’t understand you? What if they’re holding you back?”

And I listened.

God, I listened.

And in listening, I forgot to live.

I forgot to be grateful for the way my father silently placed water on my desk while I studied.

I forgot to see the love behind my mother's stubborn traditions.

I forgot to hold close the laughter over late-night noodles with the boy who once said he'd love me forever.

All I did was wait for something bigger.

For some grand moment to validate me.

To tell me: Now. Now you're happy. Now it begins.

But now I know — happiness doesn't begin.

It happens.

In fragments.

In passing.

And if you don't hold it when it comes, it slips through and becomes nothing but regret.

I wish I held more.

But I'm still here.

Still breathing.

Maybe that's enough today.

Maybe tomorrow, I'll open the curtains a little wider.

Maybe I'll walk into town.

Maybe I'll try painting again — not something profound, just the chipped teacup on my table.

And start living what's left of it.

Tara

September 18th / 2009

Dear Diary,

I turned 32 today.

And yet...

I don't feel nothing.

Not like before.

I visited their grave today.

I whispered "I'm sorry."

Not because I think it fixes everything,

but because I think it's time I let go of the weight of everything I didn't say when I could have.

And him?

I don't wait for texts anymore.

I don't check old photos.

I don't ask what went wrong.

I've started sketching again.

Not for galleries. Not for praise.

Just for me.

My hands.

They tremble less now.

Still not steady. But enough to hold a pencil.

Enough to draw a line.

Enough to continue.

I don't know what's next.

I don't even know if anything exciting ever will be.

But for the first time, I think that's okay.

Maybe surviving was my happily ever after all along.

Quiet, ordinary, imperfect —

But mine.

Tara

Emily stared at the fluttering pages silently, on next few pages were just doodles, with some pages torn and then emptiness....

I kept staring at the ceiling, hearing Tara's words echo in my mind... every page like a mirror, each year of her life peeling something raw in me I never dared to face.

It wasn't just a diary.

It was a soul — laid bare, stitched together with grief, rebellion, loneliness, and fleeting sparks of love.

And in the quiet corners of her pain, I found pieces of myself too.

When I closed that final page, I just sat there.

Still.

Numb.

But warm tears traced my cheek before I even knew I was crying.

I don't know how long I sat on the floor with the diary in my lap.

But I know what I did the moment the sun peeked through the window.

I picked up my phone.

Opened the group chat I've ignored more times than I can count.

"Dear Mom, Dad... I moved here today. It's quiet. And beautiful.

But I already miss you.

I'll try to finish writing my book soon and come back to you ASAP.

I love you."

I typed and pressed send button. I was relieved.... Thankfully I wasn't too late.

It's strange how someone I never met — someone who probably never meant for anyone to read her words — reminded me how fragile this all is.

And how easy it is to waste time thinking there's always more time.

I don't know what happened to Tara in the end.

But I think she wanted someone to hear her.

And now, someone has.

Present Time

After reading Tara's diary, I actually started looking for her.

Determined to find Tara, I embarked on a search. Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, until finally, i tracked Tara down to an old age home in a quiet neighborhood. The building's warm architecture and lush gardens seemed to radiate a sense of peace.

I found Tara in the art room, surrounded by seniors creating vibrant paintings. Tara's eyes sparkled as she worked with the residents, her hands moving deftly as she guided them.

"Tara?" Emily asked hesitantly, not wanting to interrupt.

Tara turned, her expression softening as she took in Emily's eager face. "Yes?"

"I'm Emily," Emily explained, "I found your diary... I just had to meet you."

Tara's eyes clouded for a moment, but then she smiled. "Come, let's talk."

Over steaming cups of tea, Tara shared her story. She spoke of her struggles with depression, of feeling lost and alone. But she also spoke of finding solace in art, of discovering a new purpose in helping others.

"I struggled with my depression for many years.... and still fighting with it, I sometimes couldn't stop myself from wandering into past" she continued

"I sold all the property Mom and Dad left for me and built this old age home," Tara said, her eyes shining with pride. "I wanted to create a place where seniors could feel loved and cared for. And I teach art here, too."

Emily and Tara conversed for long time.

Emily listened, entranced, as Tara shared her journey. She learned about the pain of Tara's past, but also about her resilience and determination.

"I used to think happiness was something I'd find in the future," Tara said, her voice filled with wisdom. "But I've learned to find it in the small things – a beautiful sunset, a good cup of tea, a kind word from a friend. I've stopped wasting moments searching for some grand *'happily ever after.'*"

As Emily listened, she felt a sense of awe and reverence for Tara's strength. She knew she had to tell Tara's story, to share it with the world.

"May I write about your life?" Emily asked, her heart racing with excitement.

Tara's smile was gentle. "I'd be honored."

And so, I began to write Tara's story, weaving together the threads of her past and present. As I wrote, I felt a sense of purpose, knowing that Tara's journey would inspire others to find happiness in the small things.

Tara's story became a testament to the human spirit's capacity for growth, resilience, and love. And as I finished writing the final chapter, she knew that she had discovered something truly special – the power of finding happiness in the everyday moments that make life worth living.

Emily smiled and got up as she received a text in family group chat..... It was Dad asking her about her new book. She started getting ready to go Home as she promised.

Just like Tara, Emily also started looking for *happily eve after* in small moments and suddenly life was a lot better

THE END.